

Lenten

REFLECTIONS

2020



Photo credit: Jeffrey Uryga

*“O my people! I will put my Spirit
in you that you may live...”*

—Ezekiel 37:13-14

Dear Associates, Sisters, Family and Friends,

We are drawn by Scripture, by the Spirit acting through persons who have been touched and changed through the mystery of life, death, resurrection, to pause and enter into the Lenten season.

Each of us occupies a different space in this cycle. Destruction from natural and not-so-natural disasters; violence and instability of relationships among groups and nations; grief from loss of dear ones or health—these realities sometimes feel too large and paralyzing, leaving us more aware of darkness than light, disappointment than hope.

So, in our humanness we are offered the opportunity to enter more intimately into an ever-deepening understanding of ourselves and the wonder of God's presence with us.

In each reflection we are reminded that God "has heard and seen the suffering of [God's] people," that God will put the Spirit in us "to have life," and will give us gifts to respond to the needs of this world and ourselves. Jesus, himself, experienced temptation and the risks of pouring out love and trust, in obedience to the Creator's will. This God is also present to us, showing us ways to bring new life ... to come with compassion, with ears to hear in new ways, and with voices to speak words to animate the weary.

We thank the contributors from the Area of North America who shared how the Spirit was speaking to them in the following reflections: Holy Cross Sisters Linda Bellemore, Patricia Anne Clossey, Marianne Farina, Mary Alice Bowler, Maryanne O'Neill, Rita Slattery and Eva Mary (Hooker), and Holy Cross Associate Judith Plummer.

As they quote from Father Moreau, Let us "hurry then, and take up this work of resurrection!"*

Sister Mary Tiernan, CSC
General Councilor

*Excerpted from "Christian Education,"
by Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 26, 2020

Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

These Scripture readings contain strong action words to guide us through Lent. "Return to me ... proclaim a fast ... gather the people ... let the ministers of the Lord weep ... be reconciled to God ... do not receive the grace of God in vain."

Matthew's Gospel tells us how to do this. When we pray, go to our inner room, close the door and pray to God in secret. Do not be a hypocrite. Do not pray publicly in order to win the praise of others. Fast but do not look gloomy and unkempt.

Pope Francis suggests how to live these Scriptures:

- Believe that God always knocks on the door of our hearts, that God goes out from within.
- True prayer occurs in the secrecy of our heart and is known only to God.
- We do not leave the world outside the door of our inner room but carry persons and situations in our hearts. When we pray, we open ourselves to the cry of so many close and distant persons.
- Reflecting on our sins and asking forgiveness is essential.
- Be open to newness that God wants to bring into our lives this Lent!

Pope Francis invites us to fast in order to help others, always with a smile. He exhorts us to do penance, which includes asking ourselves how we behave toward others and giving up something for Lent only if it demonstrates compassion and enriches others.

Reflection questions:

- Pope Francis invites us to begin Lent with these questions:
- What is my life like?
- Who is God for me? How is my relationship with Jesus?
- When I pray, how do I open myself to the cry of so many people in our world today?

—Sister Linda Bellemore, CSC

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

March 1, 2020

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 1

As I reflected on these readings, I was struck by the interplay of persons and the dialogues that take place. The choices and decisions that we make are not made in isolation. In other words, though we may find ourselves alone in the desert this Lent, we ultimately are not alone. Our thoughts, our prayers, our service, our actions, or our lack of action, have a profound effect on others. As our 2019 Chapter Direction Statement says, “Systemic and social sins fed by greed, individualism and abuse of power threaten to destroy the human family and the planet that sustains us. These signs of the times cry out for healing and wholeness.”

Our problems, whether local, national or international, can feel overwhelming, and we can be easily tempted toward cynicism, hopelessness or despair. Yet, we are not alone...

Our Direction Statement gives us hope as, “We stand together with peoples and companions whose generosity and faith inspire and humble us in our common call to holiness.”

Reflection questions:

- Whose voices do we listen to? Whose voices do we allow to influence us?
- What kind of influence are we for others?
- What do others ‘hear’ from us by the statement of our lives?
- And on another note, whose voices inspire us, give us hope, and spur us on to action in the service of our sisters and brothers?

Let us continue to listen to the voices that cry out for justice and compassion and to the voice within that will guide us during this Lenten season.

—*Sister Patricia Anne Clossey, CSC*

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

March 8, 2020

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; 2
Timothy 1:8b-10; Matthew 17:1-9

The word Lent comes from an Old English word *lencten*, meaning springtime. Thus, it is a season to become more fully present to new spiritual growth as we seek to follow Christ.

This week’s readings offer us a way to deepen our awareness of this growth. They point to the truth that contemplative listening is at the heart of every expression of faith: words, deeds, rituals or practices.

Abram hears God’s voice to travel toward a new land; he trusts in the promise of eternal blessing. Cooperating with God’s plan, Abram gives witness to a new genesis of Earth and all its people.

Jesus’ Transfiguration prefigures the fullness of life in the coming of the kingdom of God. The appearance of Moses and Elijah testify that the Paschal Mystery—Jesus’ life, death and resurrection—fulfills the promises spoken through the law and the prophets. The sacred command of God, “Listen to him,” is a directive that draws us nearer to Christ through our attentiveness to his words and actions. We accompany him as he journeys down the mountain to manifest God’s ongoing love through his passion, death and resurrection. The goal of this listening is to become authentic contemplatives, in the biblical sense, persons who manifest God’s compassion.

Through such listening, we hear God’s voice in the Scriptures, when we minister with others, and in our family and community life. Perhaps this second Sunday of Lent should be called “Contemplative Listening Sunday.” For as the readings remind us, aural encounters presage the action of God’s transforming love.

Reflection questions:

- How well do I practice contemplative listening?
- This week, how can we discover God’s voice in our encounters with others?

—*Sister Marianne Farina, CSC*

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 15, 2020

John 4:5-42

Today's Gospel reading is about the Samaritan woman and a remarkable invitation. Jesus comes to a well in Samaria at noon and waits there for the woman to come. When she arrives, he initiates a conversation with her by asking for help: "Give me a drink."

Their conversation then becomes more intimate as Jesus explores her personal journey, drawing her out by speaking directly to her heart. In the interchange, Jesus offers "living water" and a new way of life. She accepts, and an astonishing thing happens; Jesus reveals to her that he is the long-awaited Messiah. Her life is changed forever. She rushes off to town, proclaiming the good news to her neighbors.

This story is our story also. Jesus offers us his friendship and an ever-deepening relationship, should we choose it. He sits and waits for us at our personal wells where we frequently come seeking buckets of groundwater to satisfy our insatiable thirsts. He explores with us our questions, confusions and struggles. He asks only that we trust, opening our hearts to him in love. In turn, he promises us "living water" and a new life with him.

As our awareness and receptivity to the resurrected Christ deepens, our lives are changed and transformed. Leaving our buckets behind, we also become his disciples, rushing out to our neighbors and sharing the good news of God's love. This Lent, let us open our hearts wide, and in the spirit of Father Moreau, let us "hurry then, and take up this work of resurrection!"*

Reflection questions:

- What am I being called to leave behind that will free me to fully accept Jesus' invitation?
- What is the "living water" that Jesus is offering me this Lent?

—*Sister Mary Alice Bowler, CSC*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 22, 2020

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Psalm 23:1-6;
Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

What a beautiful progression from darkness to light in today's Scripture readings! Though deep into our Lenten journey, we have good reason today to say, "Laetare! Rejoice!"

The reading from Samuel skips over Samuel's fear that King Saul may find him as he travels to anoint the new king whom God has chosen. Still, Samuel obeys God's call; he listens and heeds God's voice in spite of the darkness of fear and uncertainty. And so, Samuel fulfills his mission!

What does it mean to "live as children of the light" as St. Paul advises us? In today's Gospel reading Jesus seizes on a teachable moment; he heals without being asked to do it. Jesus wants his disciples—and us—to see God not as a vengeful judge who bestows conditions such as blindness as a punishment for sin, but rather as a God who is merciful and beneficent.

Jesus tells his disciples—and us—that God's love can be seen in all of life's events, if only we have eyes to see! At the end of this delightful story of Jesus' interchanges with the Pharisees and the man born blind, Jesus says, "I came into this world so that those who do not see might see... ." He came to bring us light, so that in moments of darkness, fear, uncertainty, or even despair we can turn to him. Let us remember Jesus words: "Do not be afraid." "I am the light of the world." "I came [that you might see]."

"Laetare! Rejoice!"

Reflection questions:

- Does fear or uncertainty sometimes overtake you?
- Does it help to identify the cause of those fears?
- What words of Jesus help you to conquer those fears?

—*Sister Maryanne O'Neill, CSC*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 29, 2020

Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130:1-8; Romans 8:8-11;
John 11:1-45

Today's readings are beautifully reassuring, thought-provoking and challenging in their reminder of our Christian identity and the power of the Spirit alive in us.

"O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live."

That power is unbelievable for the believers we all are. It enables us to go beyond ourselves in reaching out to others in need. Our world today cries out to us. Sometimes it is our immediate world of family, local community and neighborhood. Sometimes it is a world we only know distantly, whose pains we feel as we watch the nightly news or read the daily newspaper.

We see the power of the Spirit in Jesus as he reaches out in friendship to Mary and Martha in their moment of loss. Lazarus, their brother, is dead. Mary and Martha are unafraid to voice their need and Jesus responds. They are believers!

What a model Jesus was in his quality of presence to the bereaved. He is just as present to us, bringing us to new life in whatever ways we need so that we might be transforming love for the life of the world. That is our call. Let us "hurry then, and take up this work of resurrection!"*

Reflection questions:

- Have I allowed the power of the Spirit to move me this Lent?
- How am I being called to respond to what the remaining days of Lent ask of me?
- What joy do I feel as I look back at my Advent efforts?

—*Sister Rita Slattery, CSC*

PALM SUNDAY

April 5, 2020

Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24;
Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

In today's readings, God has blessed Isaiah with many gifts, prompting our awareness of the priceless gifts God gives us morning after morning. We have all that we need to live each day, responding to the call of our loving God to speak to the weary. Just as the disheartened exiled in Babylon became weary, so, too, do we become weary on our earthly journey with the responsibilities of everyday life. Yet, we are repeatedly reminded that God is our help.

Though we know this, sometimes we feel overwhelmed and abandoned by God in certain situations, crying out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Paul, in the first part of his letter to the Philippians, uses the hymn of Jesus' humility as the attitude Jesus had during his Passion. We have the vivid image of a vessel being totally poured out, drained of whatever filled it. While at the same time mysteriously retaining his divinity, Jesus became a human being just like you and me, embracing the will of his Father that led to his death on the cross.

"Because of this," God greatly exalts Jesus, giving him the title Lord, a divine name that is shared with the Father. Paul thus explains to not only the Philippians, but to each one of us, that this is a pattern for all of us who seek to follow Jesus Christ, our savior and Our Lord.

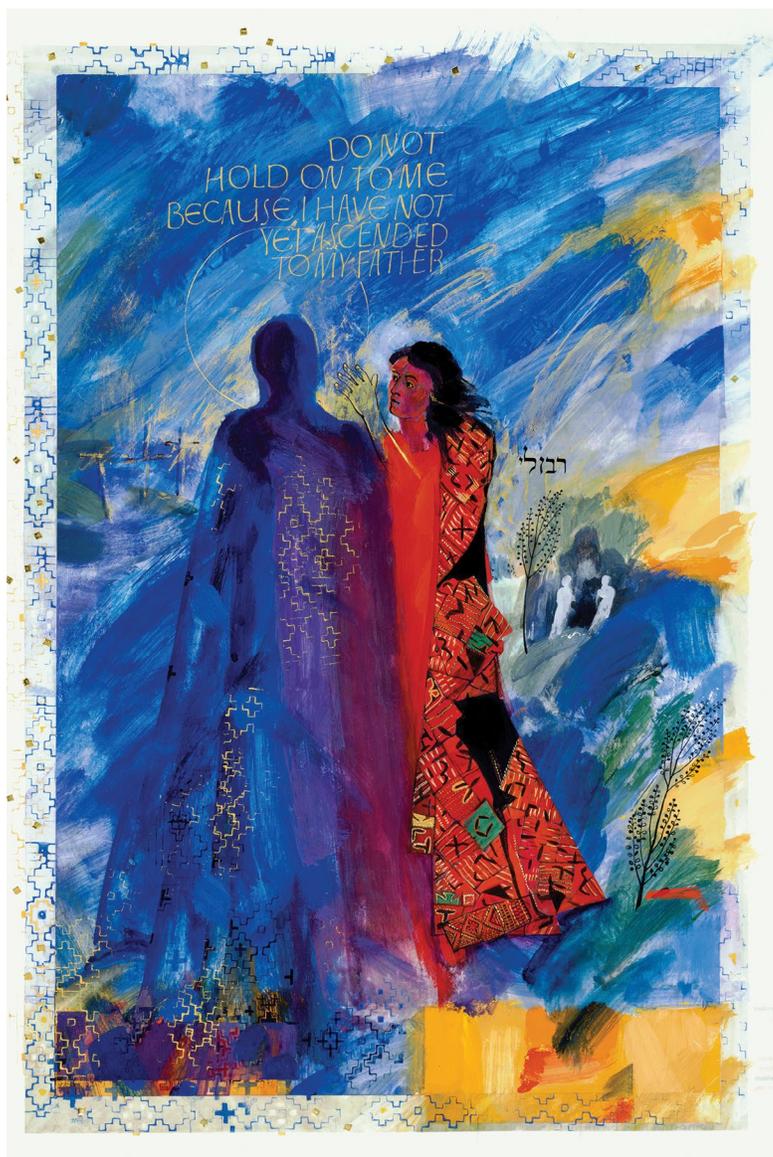
Reflection questions:

- When I feel overwhelmed with responsibilities, what do I need to do?
- Do I respond with a positive attitude when I am asked to do something difficult?
- How am I preparing to enter fully into my experience of Holy Week?

—*Judith Plummer, Holy Cross associate*

EASTER SUNDAY

April 12, 2020



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“Mary Magdalene”

Poem by Sister Eva Mary (Hooker), CSC

—a tender thing
her hand
 between his face and hers
 like moth wings

her eyelids tremble
even as his rising disturbs, exposes
her grief

makes of it a fruiting
body—
her mouth half open

as if to break her
comeliness
 did he sudden flare

all lit
 and dappled and
 close like that—

 the anatomy
 of resurrection is such
that—

(was ground a shatter zone?)
(was his hair windblown?)
(was he sunscald upon her eyes?)

her dress, the color of burst pomegranate
no time now for fretwork

[there is no
 to have and to hold]

[erasure is
 his moving finger]

she makes the rounds of the city
mourning doves their souging

whooooo whooooo
a scrap
 of sound
 [hush oh hush]

beneath the ancient fig tree and under sea weed
oh catch your breath
wash your face pack his shroud

keep watch hum octaves as the sun
presses into the sea